Ministry of Human Resources

Annual Report
1996-97

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The Honourable Garde Gardom
Lieutenant Governor
The Province of British Columbia

May it please your honour:

On July 21, 1999, the Ministry of Human Resources, and components of other ministries were brought together under the new Ministry of Social Development and Economic Security.

It is a pleasure to submit to you, as Minister of Social Development and Economic Security, the annual report for the Ministry of Human Resources for the period of April 1, 1996 to March 31, 1997.

Moe Sihota
Minister of Social Development
and Economic Security

The Honourable Moe Sihota
Minister of Social Development and Economic Security
The Province of British Columbia

Dear Minister:

It is a pleasure to submit to you, as Deputy Minister of Social Development and Economic Security, the annual report for the Ministry of Human Resources for the period of April 1, 1996 to March 31, 1997.

Sharon Manson Singer
Deputy Minister of Social Development
and Economic Security

M121

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Ministry of Human Resources Expenditures, 1996-97 (millions)

Description	Salaries and Benefits	Operating Costs	Asset Acquisition	Grants and Contributions	Other Expenditures	Recoveries	Total Expenditures
Minister's Office	0.36	0.02					0.38
Administration & Support	20.40	12.58	3.77	0.07	1.31		38.13
Income Support Programs							
Income Assistance				1,175.47	3.57	(17.50)	1,161.54
Persons with Disabilities				218.54			218.54
Health Services							
Health Care & Dental Services		0.01		54.28			54.29
Physical Assets			(2.27)				(2.27)
Total Expenditures	111.22	44.95	2.75	1,622.41	22.78	(17.50)	1,786.61

Minister's Office – provides for salaries of the minister, the minister's staff and related office expenses.

Ministry Operations – provides for income support, supporting people with disabilities so they are able to live in their communities, and health and dental care services to those in need.

Administration and Support Services – provides for overall direction, development and support of ministry programs, including ministry executive, communications, policy, planning and research, human resource and staff training, financial operations, operational review, audit services and monitoring, systems support services, ministry requirements for postal services, office furniture and equipment, and banking services. Grants and contributions are provided in support of these activities.

Projects to Support Communities – provides for community-based services which complement and support ministry programs including seniors counselling.

Income Support Programs – provide for:

Program management – direct costs of delivering income support programs including administration of benefits and services.

Income Assistance – income support to those eligible including support for individuals participating in job search and training under the Welfare to Work Program.

Income Support for Persons with Disabilities – income support for individuals designated under the Disabilities Benefits Program

Youth Works – income support for eligible individuals participating in job search and training.

Benefits are paid as grants to eligible recipients and to agencies for provision of services such as hostels and emergency shelters, user fees for continuing care and alcohol and drug rehabilitation, and other support services. Recoveries are received from assignment of repayable benefits and overpayments, and from agencies contributing to the costs of sponsored services.

Health Services – provide for:

Program management – direct operating costs of delivering health services to eligible recipients and for other ministry-approved health services.

Health Care and Dental Services – medical goods and services, medical transportation, and dental and optical services for eligible individuals and families.

Benefits are paid as grants and contributions to service providers or as direct grants to eligible individuals. Recoveries are received for repayable benefits or overpayments.

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Ministry Operations							
Administration & Support	20.40	12.58	3.77	0.07	1.31		38.13
Projects to Support Communities				**3.62**			**3.62**
Income Support Programs							
Program Management	**89.08**	**31.25**	**0.78**	**0.44**			**121.55**
Income Assistance				1,175.47	3.57	(17.50)	1,161.54
Income Support for							
Persons with Disabilities				218.54			218.54
Youth Works				**169.99**			**169.99**
Health Services							
Program Management	**1.38**	**1.09**					**2.47**
Health Care & Dental Services		0.01		54.28			54.29
Valuation Allowance					**17.90**		**17.90**
Physical Assets			(2.27)				(2.27)
Depreciation Allowance			**0.47**				**0.47**
Total Expenditures	111.22	44.95	2.75	1,622.41	22.78	(17.50)	1,786.61

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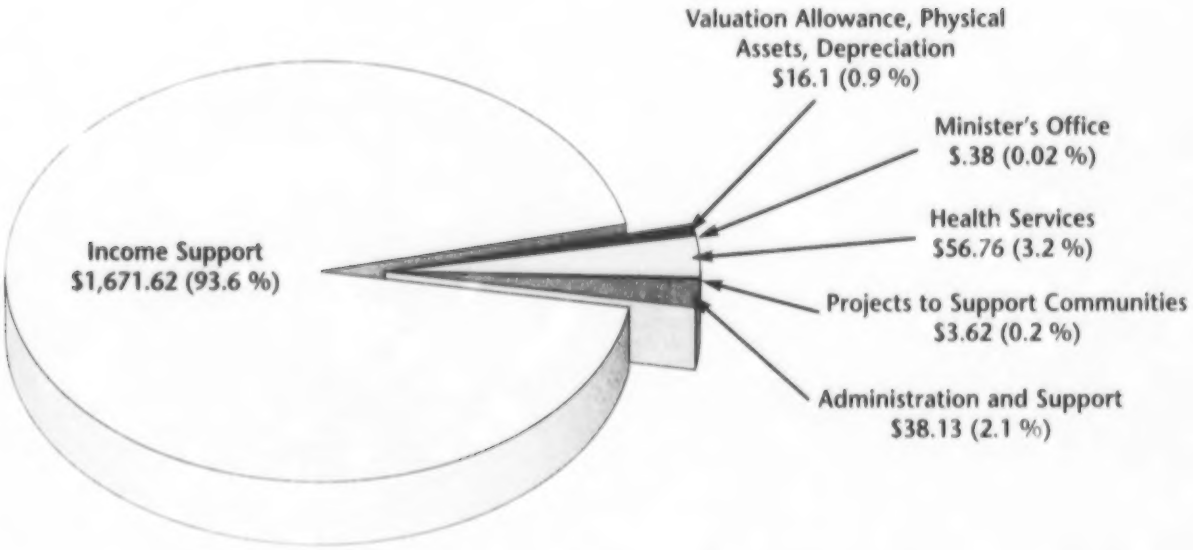
Ministry of Human Resources

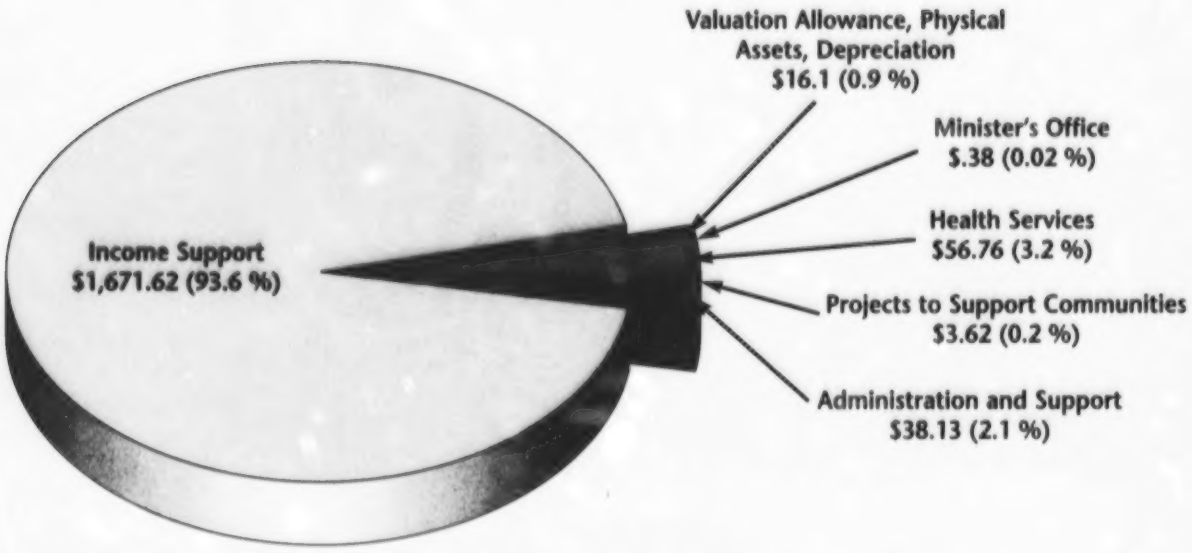
Expenditures, 1996-97 (millions)



Total Expenditure: $1,786.61

Ministry of Human Resources

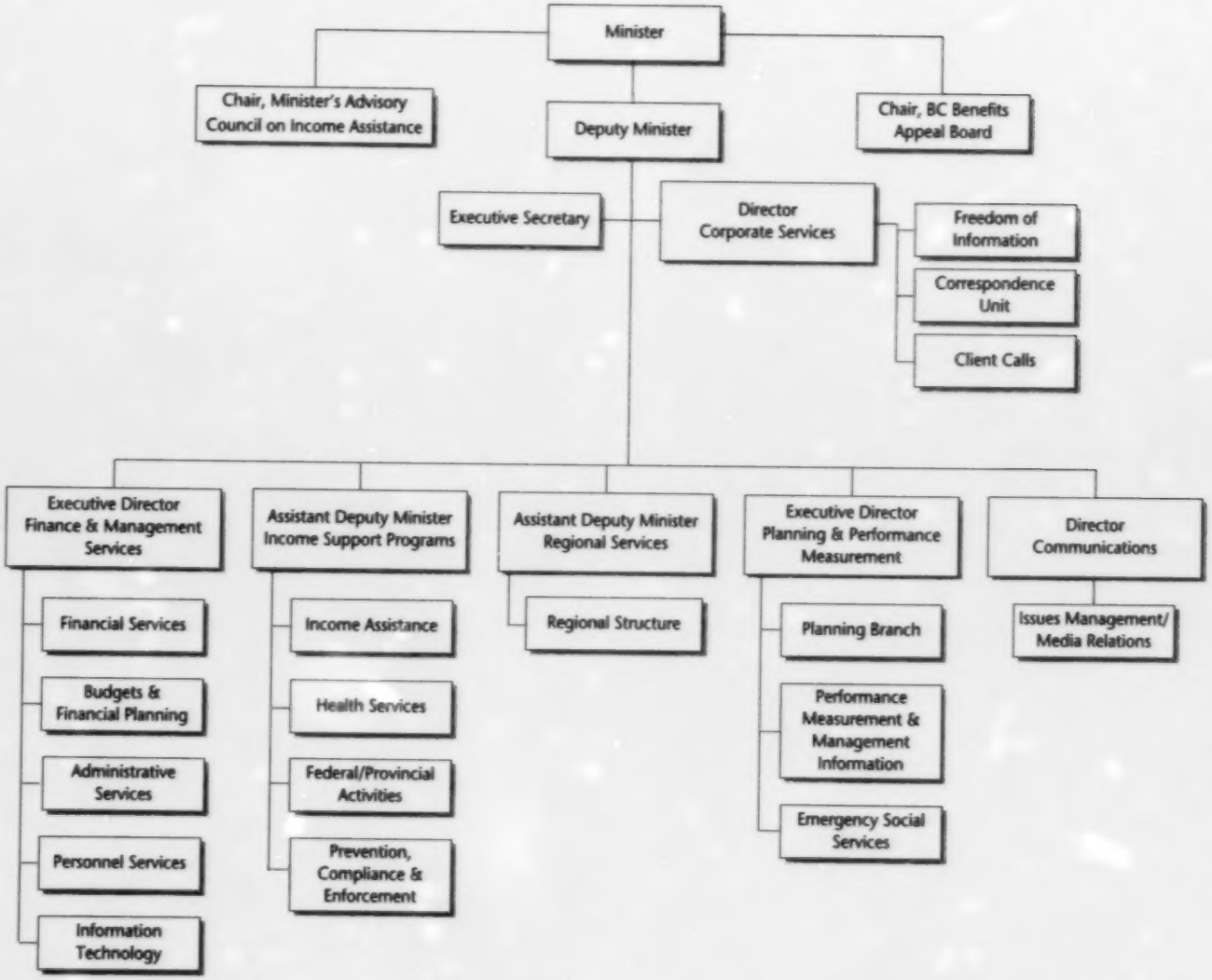
Expenditures, 1996-97 (millions)

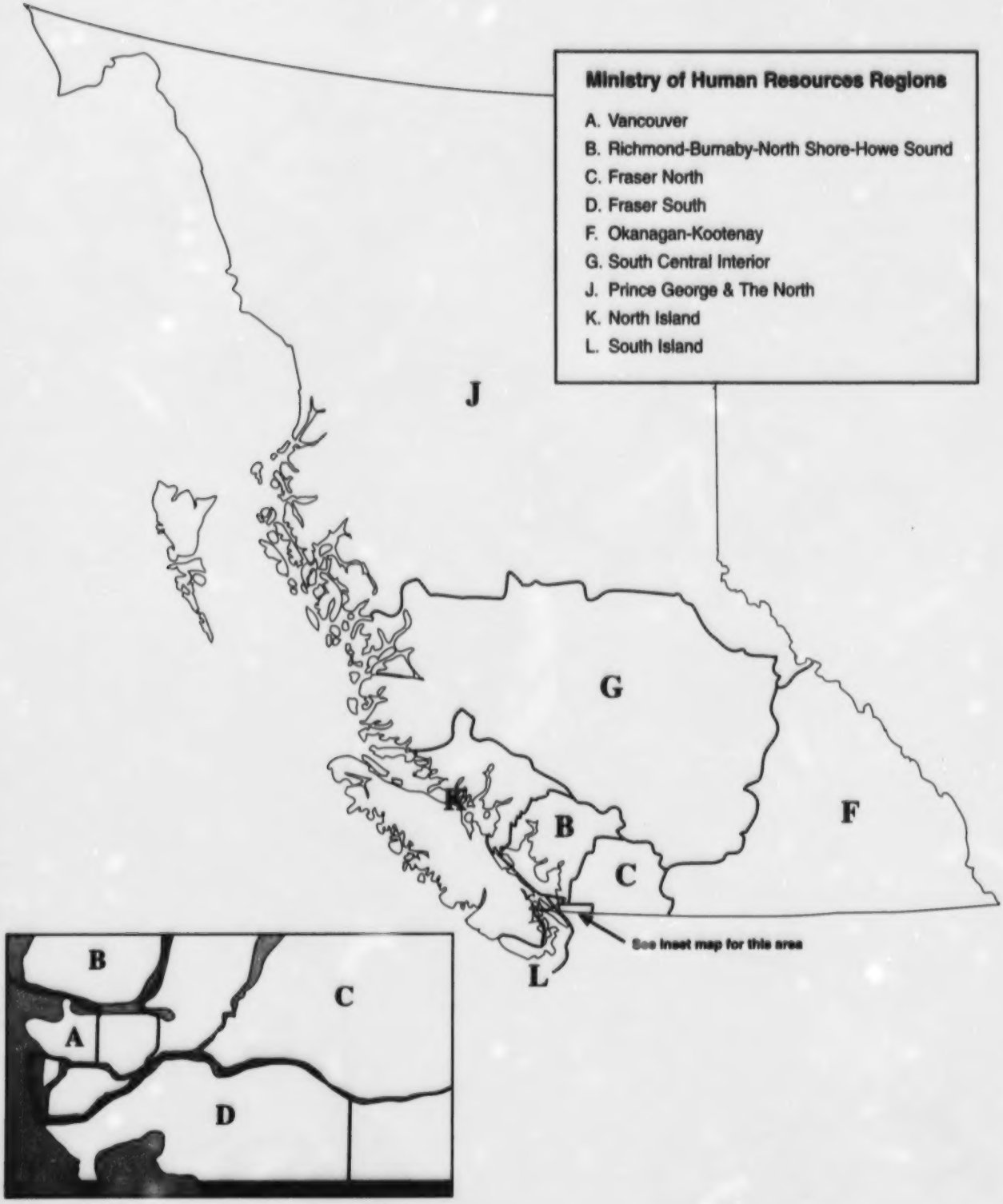


Total Expenditure: $1,786.61

Ministry of Human Resources

March 31, 1997




Ministry of Human Resources Regions
A. Vancouver
B. Richmond-Burnaby-North Shore-Howe Sound
C. Fraser North
D. Fraser South
F. Okanagan-Kootenay
G. South Central Interior
J. Prince George & The North
K. North Island
L. South Island
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See inset map for this area
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Ministry of Human Resources

The Government of British Columbia provides assistance for basic food and shelter to all eligible residents in the province. For the first half of 1996-97, these services were provided by the Ministry of Social Services (along with services for children, families and community support). In September 1996, the Ministry of Human Resources was established as a separate ministry dedicated to the administration of income support programs. The separation was intended to provide better focus, direction and quality service in these areas of responsibility.

In the previous fiscal year, the provincial government launched a series of reforms to British Columbia's social safety net aimed at better tailoring support to needs and moving away from the 'one size fits all' approach of the past. Known collectively as BC Benefits, the changes were designed to protect and support the most vulnerable in society – children, families, seniors and persons with disabilities.

During 1996-97, many of the components of BC Benefits were being developed and implemented. Delivery of several components involved cooperation and partnerships with a number of ministries to meet the BC Benefits objectives.

Addressing Child Poverty

In July 1996, British Columbia became the first province in Canada to replace welfare-based child benefits with child benefits for all low- and modest-income families, regardless of their source of income. This BC Family Bonus is administered through the tax system through the provincial Ministry of Finance and Corporate Relations, rather than as part of the welfare system. As detailed later in this report, the program has reduced child poverty and enabled many parents to move from welfare to work. During 1996-97, in meetings with counterparts in other provinces and territories, B.C.'s Premier promoted establishment of a National Child Benefit and British Columbia's model for delivering it.

In April 1996, the Healthy Kids program was introduced to provide up to $700 each year for dental and optical care for children in low-income families. The program became the policy and fiscal responsibility of the Ministry for Children and Families after the split of the Ministry of Social Services in September 1996, while the Ministry of Human Resources assumed responsibility for administration of payments.

Labour Market Attachment

In October 1996, the 20-year-old Guaranteed Available Income for Need Act was repealed and two new pieces of legislation were brought into effect: the BC Benefits (Income Assistance) Act and BC Benefits (Appeals) Act. BC Benefits is structured to value work over welfare. Youth Works and Welfare to Work programs were developed to combine MHR financial support with training programs through the Ministry of Education, Skills and Training. Youth Works programming focused on employable people age 19 to 24 years and ended welfare for young people in British Columbia. Instead, these youth receive a living allowance to support their participation in job search and work preparation programs provided through the Ministry of Education, Skills and Training. Welfare to Work programs were designed to meet the needs of MHR clients age 25 to 59 years (clients age 60 to 64 have the option of participating).

People with Disabilities

On March 31, 1997, the last day of the reporting period, other components of BC Benefits were brought into effect, including the Disability Benefits Program Act, the BC Benefits (Youth Works) Act, the BC Benefits (Child Care) Act and previously unproclaimed provisions of the BC Benefits (Income Assistance) Act and the BC Benefits (Appeals) Act.

Program Integrity

Accompanying the BC Benefits programs was a series of initiatives to prevent fraud, misuse and abuse of the welfare system, including early detection and expanded data matching with other jurisdictions, described in detail later in this report.

The combination of growing numbers of welfare applicants coming from other provinces and federal cuts to social service transfer payments caused the ministry to react in December 1995 by introducing three-month residency as an eligibility requirement for welfare. (In June 1996, the ministry exempted refugee claimants who, due to federal rules, were unable to seek work for six months.)

The federal government responded by withholding $46.9 million in transfer payments from Canada to B.C. The dispute was resolved in March 1997 when B.C. withdrew its residency requirement in return for:

- a reduction in the size of the federal penalty to $20.3 million;
- an increase of $22.4 million in federal funding for immigration settlement in B.C.; and
- joint settlement service projects totaling $120 million to enhance Vancouver's role as a gateway to the Asia-Pacific region.

Income Support Programs

Income Assistance

Objective: *To help low income families with the costs of raising their children while making it more attractive for those on welfare to seek work.*

Strategy: The BC Family Bonus was introduced in July 1996, and is delivered to about 45 per cent of B.C. families through the Ministry of Finance and Corporate Relations. The BC Family Bonus is available to all low- and modest-income families regardless of their source of income. The amount is based on income tax returns filed with Revenue Canada for the previous year. For families on welfare, the BC Family Bonus replaces the child support portion of their cheque. If a family files an income tax return and meets the eligibility requirements for the BC Family Bonus, Revenue Canada sends a monthly cheque automatically. Families with income of less than $18,000 receive the full BC Family Bonus of $103 per month for each child under 18 years. Support diminishes to zero at $33,540 for families with one or two children. The BC Family Bonus makes it easier for families with children to get off welfare and stay off because they continue to receive benefits for their children outside the welfare system as they establish themselves in employment.

Results: According to a report commissioned by the ministry and submitted in January 1997, the poverty gap for working poor B.C. families has decreased by an estimated 19 per cent. (The poverty gap is the amount needed to achieve the Low Income Cut-Off (LICO), the income level below which families spend more than 55 per cent of their income on food, shelter and clothing.) For single parent families, the estimated reduction in the poverty gap was even higher, almost 26 per cent. Report author Michael Mendelson said the "very impressive rates of reduction in poverty are due to the targeted nature of the BC Family Bonus providing a benefit to the working poor that previously went only to those on welfare." Ninety-five per cent of BC Family Bonus benefits were provided to families with incomes less than $30,000 per year. The benefit was provided to 220,000 families (45 per cent of BC families) with 420,000 children.

Mendelson also reported there were early indications of a very substantial impact on caseload, especially among single parents. Caseloads began to decrease sharply immediately upon the introduction of the BC Family Bonus, most visibly among both single parents (1,600 fewer cases each month) and dependent children (4,000 fewer each month dependent on welfare). The ministry recorded a 14 per cent decline in families with dependent children on welfare - to 61,850 in March 1997 from 72,121 a year earlier.

Strategy: Healthy Kids was introduced in April 1996 to provide basic dental and optical services of up to $700 per year for children in low-income families. Some 110,000 children in low-income families on income assistance were eligible and another 125,000 children in low-income working families were also eligible.

Results: About 70,000 children received Healthy Kids benefits.

Objective: *To enhance families' ability to plan for long-term support for people with disabilities.*

Strategy: Legislative changes to the treatment of trusts were introduced in April 1996. A trust of more than $3,000 controlled by the beneficiary previously disqualified a single person with a disability for disability benefits. That upper limit was increased to $100,000. Previously, all payments from a trust, whether controlled by the beneficiary or a trustee, were deemed as income and deducted from monthly benefits. Under the change, payments from trusts for costs associated with the disability are not deducted from benefits. This change gives families greater freedom to establish trusts so their children can continue to receive the same level of care after parents are no longer able to act as caregivers.

Results: The changes have made more resources available to people with disabilities and enhanced families' ability to plan for the future.

Objective: *To help those with multiple barriers to employment – mental illness, homelessness, substance abuse, illiteracy – to reintegrate into their communities and the labour market.*

Strategy: During 1996-97, the ministry supported a number of pilot projects from its Community Services Fund aimed at helping communities provide specialized services and assistance to enable people to rebuild their lives. Program elements included participating in volunteer work, attending support groups, providing stable housing and trying to move people into work, even part-time work. Forty-three contracts were awarded in Victoria, Surrey and Vancouver.

Results: Based on the pilot project results, the ministry began in March 1997 to encourage other communities with populations of street people to develop similar projects and apply for funding from the province. Proposals for expansion of the program were received from Prince George, Kamloops, Kelowna, Nanaimo, New Westminster and the Fraser Valley.

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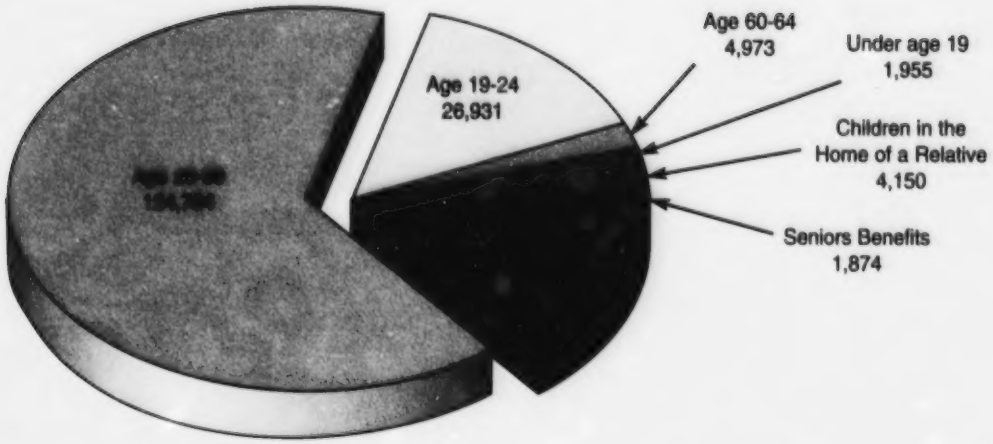
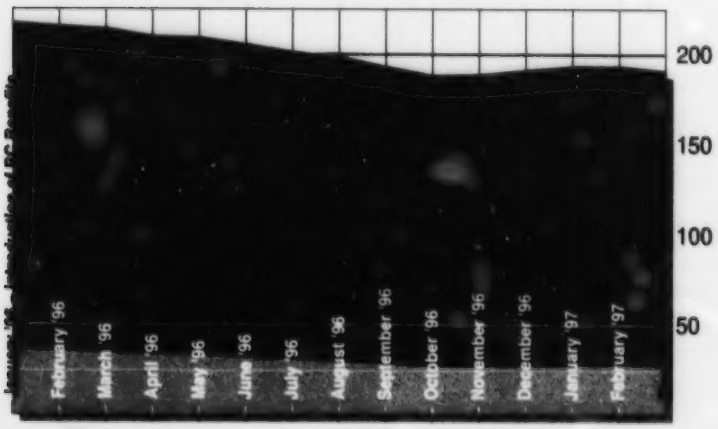
Income Support Caseload
March 1997 – Total = 191,242

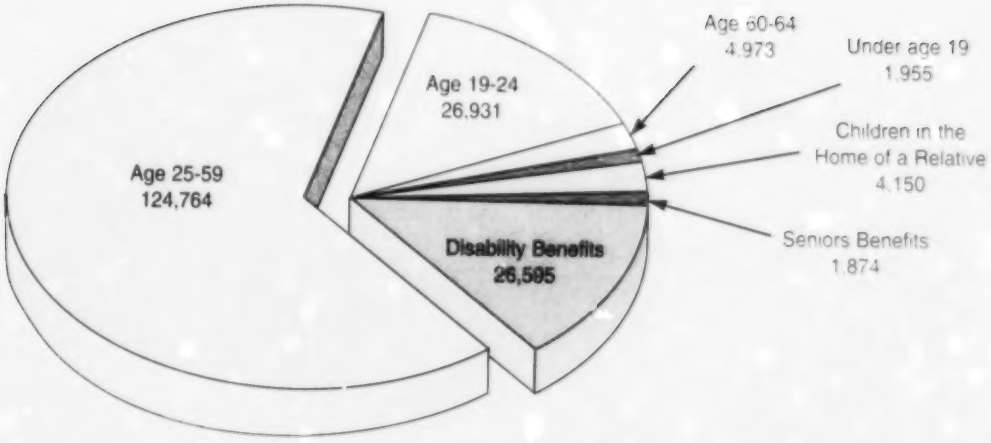


Income Support Caseload (000s)
January 1996 to March 1997



Note: The graph above details total caseload (1) and selected parts of the caseload (2,3, and 4). It does not detail all parts of the caseload and there is overlap between the two age categories and the caseload of families with children.

Income Support Caseload
March 1997 – Total = 191,242



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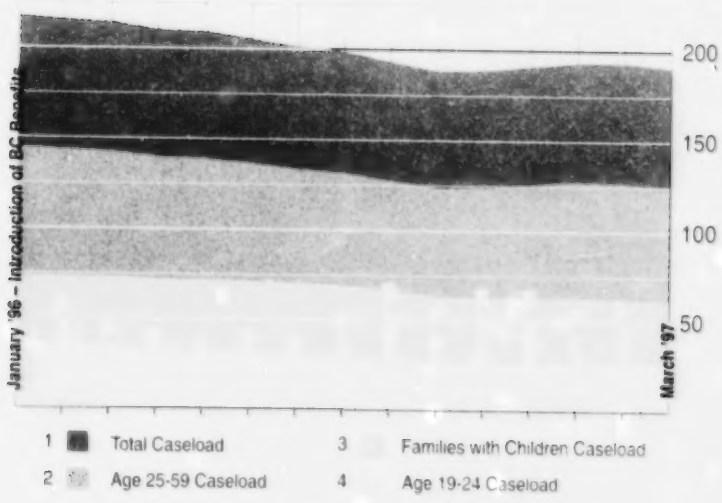
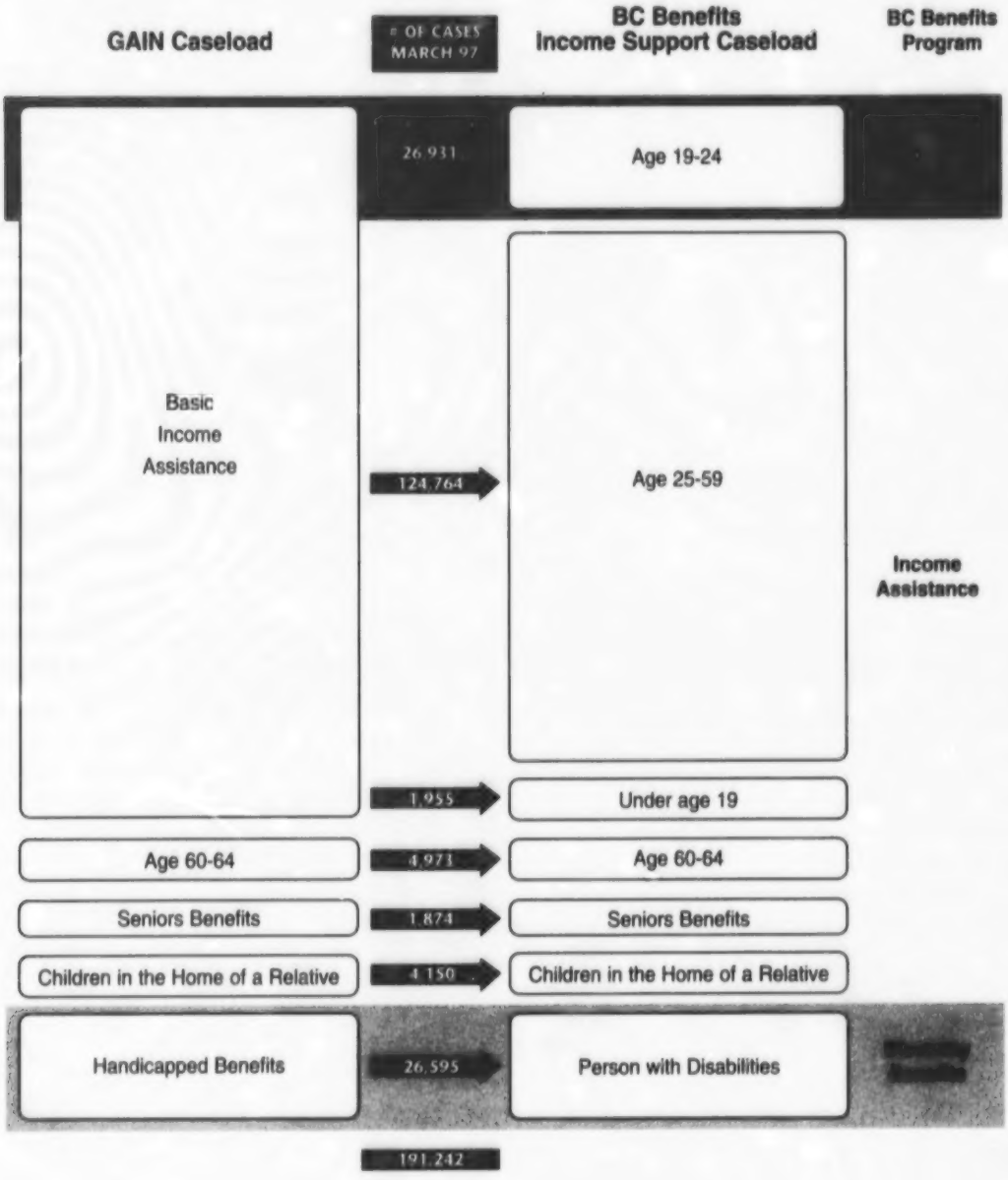


Note: The graph above details total caseload (1) and selected parts of the caseload (2, 3, and 4). It does not detail all parts of the caseload and there is overlap between the two age categories and the caseload of families with children.

This chart shows the difference in statistical reporting of the caseload under BC Benefits compared to reporting under the Guaranteed Available Income for Need (GAIN) system.

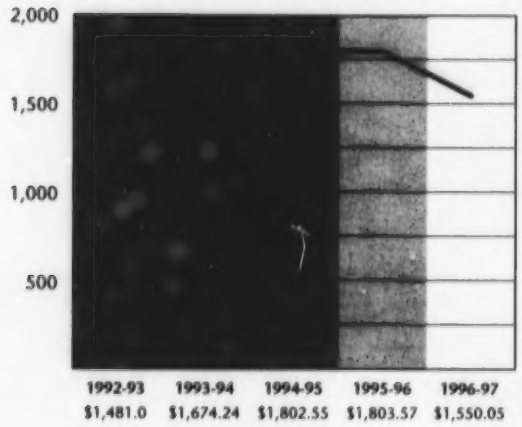


BC Benefit Income Support Rates, Effective August 1996

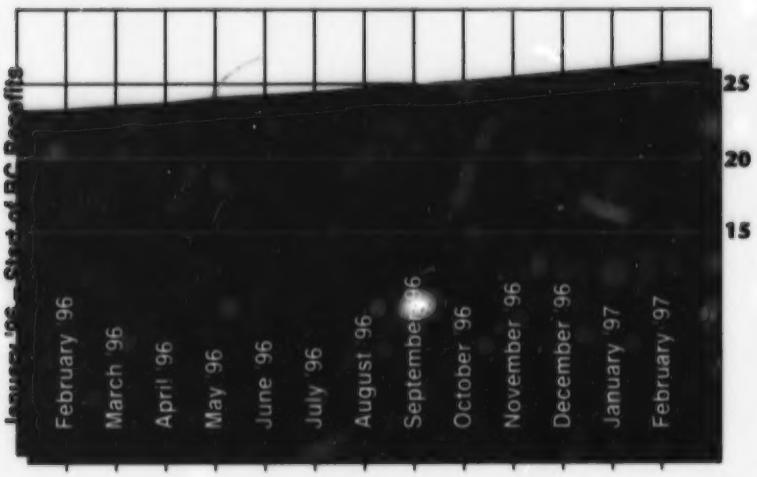
Family Size	Employable/ Temporarily excused	Unemployable or Age 60-64	Single Parents (non Disability Benefits)	Disability/ Seniors
Single	$500	$596	N/A	$771
Single (age 55-59)	$546	$596	N/A	$771
Two persons	$811	$953	$879	$1,128
Couple (age 55-59)	$903	$953	N/A	$1,128
Three persons	$993	$1,043	$969	$1,218
Four persons	$1,033	$1,083	$1,009	$1,258
Five persons	$1,083	$1,133	$1,059	$1,308
Six persons	$1,113	$1,163	$1,089	$1,338
Seven persons	$1,143	$1,193	$1,119	$1,368
Eight persons or more	add $20 for each person	add $20 for each person	add $20 for each person	add $20 for each person

1. Single parents designated under the *Disability Benefits Program Act* receive an additional $175 per month.
2. Couples and two-parent families where two members are eligible for Disability Benefits or Seniors Benefits receive an additional $175 per month.
3. BC Family Bonus - These rates reflect a transfer of income support from BC Benefits to the BC Family Bonus which provides up to $103 per month per child based on income whether from work or from BC Benefits. Consequently, for families of three or more, these rates are $103 per child lower than the rates prior to August 1996.

Income Support Expenditures
1992-93 to 1996-97 (millions)



Disability Benefits Caseload (000s)
January 1996 to March 1997



Disability Benefits

Disability Benefits programs provide income on a long-term basis to people with disabilities (in recognition of extra expenses they incur). Since the introduction of a new broader definition of 'disability' in January 1996, the number of benefits cases grew by 16.2 per cent to 26,818 in April 1997. This new legal definition enshrined in the *Disability Benefits Program Act* is now the broadest in Canada.

Seniors Benefits

Benefits are provided to seniors to meet their everyday needs and maintain their independence and dignity. In March 1997, 1,874 seniors received this benefit compared with 1,850 in March 1996.

Hardship Assistance

Hardship assistance is a short-term benefit intended to assist clients who are not eligible for income assistance but, because of unusual circumstances, require emergency assistance. Particular care is taken if there are children or people with disabilities in the family.

Reductions in both expenditures and cases in 1996-97 resulted from ministry efforts to improve the determination of eligibility. Hardship assistance expenditures less recoveries during 1996-97 totalled $94.7 million, compared with $130.2 million in 1995-96. In April 1997, 16,004 hardship grants were provided, a decrease of 31.8 per cent from December 1995, a 16-month period which includes the entire 1996-97 fiscal period.

Supplemental Allowances

Supplemental allowances provide assistance to those in need due to unique circumstances.

Supplemental Allowances – Expenditures (millions)

	96-97	95-96	94-95	93-94	92-93	Rates (applicable during 1996-97)
Crisis Grants	$13.4	$18.0	$26.0	$22.4	$15.8	No set rate
Christmas Allowance	9.3	10.5	9.9	9.5	8.2	$35/single, $70/couple, $10/dependent.
School Start-up	3.7	3.7	3.4	3.2	2.6	$42/students 5 to 11, $58 /students 12 +
Repatriation	0.2	0.21	0.14	0.11	0.10	No set rate
Camp Fees	0.67	0.68	0.87	0.80	0.69	No set rate
Diet	3.8	2.0	1.7	1.5	1.6	$20/month
Natal Allowance	1.97	1.9	1.6	1.5	1.4	$25/mo., up to $40/mo.
Comfort Allowance	5.4	5.4	5.4	5.3	5.0	$82/mo.
Burials	1.96	1.8	1.8	1.8	1.5	$917 for adult, $690 for children
Guide Dog	0.39	0.39	0.37	0.027		$62/month

Family Maintenance

During 1996-97, family maintenance staff worked with income assistance recipients to obtain their maintenance and child support payments from spouses. About 7,000 families on welfare were enrolled in the program in 1996-97. During the year, 2,440 new orders were obtained against delinquent spouses with a total value of $984,000, compared with 2,047 the previous year at a total value of $637,467. The number of new orders has doubled since 1993-94. In addition to monthly benefits, clients who receive maintenance payments on time are eligible for an additional incentive amount of up to $100 for families with children and $50 for singles. B.C. remains the only province in Canada to provide this incentive for non-custodial spouses to ensure extra benefits for their families.

Adult Residential Care

The ministry paid $24 million to alcohol and drug treatment facilities, recovery homes, long-term care facilities on behalf of income assistance recipients and to income assistance recipients directly during 1996-97.

Temporary Accommodation

The ministry paid emergency shelters $11.1 million during 1996-97 for room and board for transient income assistance recipients or others who were in crisis and required accommodation. In all, there are 34 hostels with a total contracted capacity of 540 beds, seven shelters for accommodating families with a capacity of 96 beds and two 'safehouses' to accommodate youth aged 16 to 19 years. These resources are spread across 26 communities throughout B.C. Annual occupancy rates range between 75 and 88 per cent.

Bus Passes

Responsibility for the bus pass program, which was with the Ministry of Social Services in 1995-96, was transferred to the Ministry of Finance and Corporate Relations at the beginning of 1996-97.

Health Services

The Health Services Division provides basic Medical Services Plan coverage, optical and dental services, medical equipment and supplies and other medically necessary services to eligible persons in need. It also approves applications for a disability designation under the *Disability Benefits Program Act*.

Objective: *To develop, consult and implement a much broader approach to eligibility for the Disability Benefits Program.*

Strategy: In partnership with disability advocates, the government has changed the definition of "handicapped status" under the *Disability Benefits Program Act* regulations. They now better reflect the realities of people with disabilities, recognizing that disabling conditions can be episodic and/or permanent in nature and removing employability as a criterion for disability designation.

Results: People in need who were previously excluded from receiving benefits are now eligible for benefits. People with disabilities no longer need to declare themselves permanently unemployable to be eligible for benefits and are encouraged to participate in the labour market.

Objective: *To develop effective community training on the role of the Health Services program within the context of income support programs.*

Strategy: This has been addressed in part with the expanded roles of BC Benefits coordinators in the field.

Results: Field staff are better positioned to assess client eligibility for health services.

Objective: *To develop the infrastructure for automatic assignment of personal health numbers resulting in faster, simpler service delivery.*

Strategy: This is now accomplished through the Ministry Information System.

Results: Clients experience no delay in accessing needed medical care. In addition, the process has provided administrative efficiencies for both the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Human Resources.

Objective: *To eliminate the need for clients to obtain approval for emergency drugs through a ministry district office.*

Strategy: An automated link between the ministry and the Pharmanet Program was completed and is fully operational.

Results: Medical emergencies which require drug treatment for income support recipients are handled with minimum inconvenience or delay.

Federal/Provincial Activities

The Federal/Provincial Activities Branch is responsible for providing advice, policy development and issues management on federal/provincial initiatives. It supports and undertakes federal/provincial negotiations and works closely with other governments, ministries and agencies on national social policy, representing the ministry on federal/provincial/territorial committees and working groups.

Objective: *To negotiate terms and implementation of a National Child Benefit.*

Strategy: As lead province, B.C. worked to coordinate provincial implementation of a National Child Benefit (NCB) through negotiations with the federal government and other provinces and territories. The NCB will help prevent and reduce child poverty while at the same time promoting attachment to the labour market to help ensure that families will always be better off as a result of working.

Results: Federal, provincial and territorial governments have jointly agreed to implement the NCB by July 1998.

Objective: *To work with federal, provincial and territorial partners toward reform of disability income and support programs.*

Strategy: As a member of the Working Group on Benefits and Services for Persons with Disabilities, British Columbia helped design a framework on harmonization strategies. It focused on three goals: reducing barriers to work in income support programs; rehabilitation and labour market re-entry supports; and joint action to streamline and coordinate assessment processes.

Results: Provinces and territories will be required to report annually on progress on these harmonization initiatives.

Objective: *To negotiate payment of $46.9 million in federal transfer payments withheld by the federal government because B.C. imposed a three-month residency requirement for welfare recipients.*

Strategy: Branch staff assisted in the negotiation process.

Results: An agreement was reached between the federal government and B.C. and is detailed in the introduction to this annual report on page 6.

Prevention, Compliance and Enforcement

The Prevention, Compliance and Enforcement Branch works to preserve the integrity of the income support system by working in partnership with all staff to ensure compliance with the *B.C. Benefits (Income Assistance) Act*, the *BC Benefits (Youth Works) Act* and the *Disability Benefits Program Act*. The branch also prevents, detects and prosecutes fraud.

Prevention

Early Detection and Prevention Program

Objective: *To prevent and deter fraud by denying benefits before they are fraudulently obtained.*

Strategy: To improve the eligibility determination process, categories of high risk clients are identified by trained intake workers using carefully defined criteria. High risk applicants are referred to verification officers for pre-eligibility verification which may include a home visit, an address check, a second interview, and/or a check of other information sources. Sixteen pilot sites were operating in district offices at the start of 1996-97. During the year, the program was expanded to include 40 sites and the number of verification officers was increased to 61 from 27.

Results: It is expected this program will reduce fraudulent claims which will in turn enhance effective caseload management. In addition, savings in benefits that might have been incorrectly issued without this kind of intervention are estimated at $15.1 million annually.

Identification Guide

Strategy: To assist district offices in detecting false identification, an identification guide was created which contains copies of original documents against which suspected forgeries or duplicates can be compared.

Results: There has been a 21 per cent reduction in the number of duplicate assistance and false identification fraud referrals compared with the previous year.

Information Sharing (Data Matching) Program

Objective: *To prevent overpayments to persons receiving duplicate benefits or other income; and to assist those clients who have not accessed other sources of income or benefits for which they are eligible .*

Strategy: Computer data matching compares information from income support recipients against that held by federal or provincial government ministries or other agencies. Applicants are always advised their name will be put through the data matching process. Data is matched with:

- social welfare programs in Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba to identify

those claiming benefits in more than one jurisdiction,

- Human Resources Development Canada to identify persons receiving Employment Insurance benefits, and
- Lotto BC to identify clients who have received lottery winnings.

Data matching also identifies those who have outstanding warrants against them for indictable offences. These individuals are ineligible for assistance until they present themselves to authorities in B.C. or in the jurisdiction issuing the warrant. If there are children in the family, repayable hardship assistance may be issued until the warrant is withdrawn. Other data matching agreements being negotiated include:

- the Ontario welfare system to identify dual claimants,
- the Canada Pension Plan to identify persons not declaring CPP income,
- Revenue Canada to identify persons not declaring income,
- the student loan system to identify persons receiving both a loan and income support benefits, and
- the Old Age Security system to identify persons over 60 years old who are eligible for OAS benefits.

Results: Data matches identify an average of 245 cases each year with an annual cost saving of about $1,000 per case.

Administrative Disqualification for Convicted or Admitted Fraud

Objective: *To deter those tempted to defraud the welfare system.*

Strategy: Effective March 31, 1997, recipients who:

- admit to having received benefits to which they were not entitled or
- are subject to a civil court judgment caused by receiving assistance to which they were not entitled or
- are convicted of fraud

are ineligible for three benefit months. Persons with dependent children may be considered for repayable hardship assistance.

Results: Savings from administrative disqualification are estimated to be $2.05 million in the 1997-98 fiscal year following the change.

Compliance

Objective: *To maintain public confidence in income support programs by ensuring that benefits are delivered to individuals and families who are truly in need.*

Strategy: Thirty-one eligibility officers target specific aspects of BC Benefits programs which are susceptible to fraud and administrative error. They reassess eligibility of recipients through personal interviews, confirmation of identity, income and assets, home visits and analysis of data from within and outside the ministry. Benefits are stopped when a person is found ineligible. Persons who received benefits to which they are not entitled must repay them. Recipients who are found to be entitled to more benefits have their benefits increased to the appropriate level.

Results: During 1996-97, the total projected saving for the compliance program was $15.3 million of which 43 per cent ($6.6 million) resulted from reviews by eligibility officers. Two provincial eligibility projects were:

Canada Pension Plan (CPP)

From April to December 1996, a search of the ministry client database identified some 4,400 persons receiving assistance who might be eligible, but had not applied, for Canada Pension Plan Survivor's benefits. Each person was interviewed and assisted in making a claim with CPP. Savings of $1.2 million resulted.

BC Family Bonus

From October 1996 to March 1997, a review of the ministry database revealed that some 1,200 persons receiving income assistance were not receiving the $103 per month BC Family Bonus for their children even though they had declared no other income to the ministry. An eligibility review was conducted with each family to determine if income had been earned but not declared. The resulting savings were estimated at $2.9 million.

From May to August 1996, 16 summer students were employed in the Lower Mainland to perform residence and identification checks on 6,532 dormant files (where there was no client contact for six months or more). As a result, 2,221 cases were recommended for closure, decreases in benefits were recommended in 222 cases and overpayments were identified in 100 cases, for an estimated saving of $7.7 million (51 per cent of the total projected savings of $15.3 million).

Enforcement

Objective: *To reduce the incidence of fraud over time by investigating and prosecuting offenders.*

Strategy: Enforcement is carried out by 40 ministry investigators and 31 assistant ministry investigators, located at 20 different sites around the province.

Ministry investigators gather evidence, interview suspected offenders and witnesses, prepare and execute search warrants, prepare reports to Crown counsel, testify in court, register court restitution orders and prepare affidavits for civil debt collection.

Assistant ministry investigators investigate fraud referrals where repayment agreements are taken as opposed to undertaking a criminal prosecution.

Results: During 1996-97, ministry investigators conducted 2,142 investigations which resulted in 333 new charges. This is an increase of 34 per cent over the previous year. Assistant ministry investigators investigated 9,760 cases and obtained 5,581 repayment agreements valued at $10.9 million (87 per cent of the $12.6 million taken in repayments). This does not include savings from file closures which resulted from their investigations.

Fraud referrals

	1992-93	1993-94	1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
Cases opened	9,487	11,960	12,747	12,746	14,864
Cases closed	6,788	7,191	14,684	11,221	11,902
Cases outstanding	3,154	7,923	5,986	7,511	10,473

Estimated savings from investigations, $

	1992-93	1993-94	1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
Benefits stopped	3,230,080	4,417,280	8,583,680	5,075,840	2,393,028
Repayment	4,209,575	4,601,775	3,296,714	9,065,140	12,638,576
Compensation	185,494	287,192	994,269	801,085	1,474,641
Total	**7,625,149**	**9,306,247**	**12,874,663**	**14,942,065**	**16,506,245**

Court Cases

	1992-93	1993-94	1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
Before court at April 1	45	87	115	154	261
New Cases Charged	117	111	158	248	333
Cases closed	75	83	119	141	231
Cases outstanding	87	115	154	261	363

Planning and Performance Measurement

Planning

The branch provides professional planning, policy and analytical services to the ministry, coordinates its strategic/business planning and estimates process, develops and coordinates ministry legislation and regulation, and tracks and stores cabinet documents for the ministry.

In April 1996, the Ministry of Social Services established an Aboriginal Negotiations Branch to be responsible for policy, planning and federal provincial responsibilities respecting aboriginal issues, and for developing treaty mandates relevant to the ministry as it was then. When the Ministry of Human Resources was created in September 1996, the Planning Branch took over the lead in policy and planning respecting Aboriginal income assistance issues. During 1996-97, the branch produced a draft treaty mandate paper on income assistance for use by the Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs.

One of the primary goals of the Planning Branch was to continue development of the BC Benefits legislative framework in cooperation with other agencies of government. Legislation was introduced in the spring 1996 session of the Legislature and brought into force in part in October 1996. The balance of the legislation was brought into force in March 1997. The branch also prepared amendments to BC Benefits legislation with respect to family maintenance.

Performance Measurement and Management Information

The branch collects, maintains and ensures consistency of research information and statistics necessary for the effective monitoring and analysis of ministry programs and their success. When the Ministry of Human Resources was created in September 1996, the branch inherited half the staff from the comparable branch under the previous Social Services ministry.

During 1996-97, the Information Management Unit developed a monthly BC Benefits Program Monitoring Report and released the first issue in May 1996. The report details income support caseloads and expenditures with breakdowns for each BC Benefits program area by family type, region, immigrant status and number of children.

The Performance Measures Unit was set up during 1996-97 to develop a set of measures that report activity in each of the 138 offices and in the nine regions. The activities reported include use and impact of the new verification officers, new cases starting, cases ending and training activity. Full data gathering to support the new sets of measurements did not begin until the following fiscal year.

Emergency Social Services

Emergency social services (ESS) provide shelter, food, clothing, registration, inquiry and emotional support to those forced from their homes by natural or man-made emergencies such as fires, earthquakes, floods or toxic substance spills. More than 5,000 ESS volunteers provide the services in more than 120 communities across British Columbia. The branch supports them both directly and through public and private sector partnerships and contracts. The branch is also responsible for planning to ensure ministry operations continue following a disaster.

About 4,000 B.C. residents were assisted by emergency social services during 1996-97 after being forced from their homes by house and apartment fires, flooding, landslides, a gas line rupture, a bomb scare and a major blizzard in the southwestern corner of the province in December 1996. About 2,400 people were assisted by ESS volunteers as a result of the blizzard which brought public transport to a standstill in Victoria, isolated many in their homes and even sank one houseboat in Esquimalt, leaving a family of three homeless. The effects of the blizzard were also felt in the Fraser Valley, Boston Bar and Merritt, where services were also provided.

Objective: *To monitor the effectiveness of the provincial emergency social services response plan.*

Strategy: Exercise Thunderbird II was carried out during 1996-97 to test ESS response to a moderate earthquake in the Capital Region.

Result: Response and communications systems were assessed. Where they were found deficient, plans were made for improvements.

Objective: *To provide emergency communications links for ESS volunteers throughout the province, enabling them to relay critical information about emergency situations.*

Strategy: The digital amateur radio system developed in previous years for ESS volunteers was extended during 1996-97 into the northern interior and Kootenay areas of the province, linking everyone with the provincial ESS operations centre.

Result: Preparedness for emergency situations was enhanced.

Objective: *To make emergency supplies more readily available in all areas of the province.*

Strategy: During 1996-97, the BC Housing Management Commission initiated the first stockpile of cots, blankets and bedding in facilities it operates in Prince Rupert. A similar stockpile was subsequently created in Prince George.

Result: When ESS volunteers open a reception centre for victims of future disaster in these areas, emergency supplies will be more readily and quickly available.

Communications

The Communications Branch supports programs and initiatives of the ministry by providing central communications planning, media relations and issues management, and by developing and distributing information to clients, advocacy groups and the general public.

During 1996-97, the branch provided communications support for:

- British Columbia's role in federal/provincial/territorial negotiations for the development of the National Child Benefit, a program to help reduce child poverty in Canada;
- the launch of the BC Family Bonus, a program which replaced welfare-based child benefits with child benefits for all low- and modest-income families;
- the introduction of Healthy Kids to provide up to $700 each year for dental and optical care for children in low-income families; and
- transition of services for clients due to the closure of 14 offices around the province.

The branch also developed information packages for:

- the repeal of the Guaranteed Income for Need Act and the bringing into effect of the BC Benefits (Income Assistance) Act and the BC Benefits (Appeals) Act;
- the Disability Benefits Program Act, brought into effect at year end, which broadened the definition of disability to the most inclusive in Canada; and
- a pilot project introducing electronic banking for people with disabilities.

The branch expanded avenues of access to information, including:

- introduction of BC Benefits Statistics Report to provide regular income support caseload data and articles of interest to the media, policy analysts, academics and the general public;
- the establishment of the ministry Web site which contains ministry publications, news releases, regional and district office information and new programs and initiatives. The Web site is at http://www.mhr.gov.bc.ca;
- the development and release of revised MSS Fast Track, an easy-to-use guide to the ministry, to all constituency offices. MSS Fast Track assists MLAs with information to respond to basic client requests or concerns; and
- production of publications with key ministry information to assist clients with language or literacy challenges.

The branch provided media relations and issues management for:

- federal/provincial issues around child poverty,
- the imposition of a three-month residency requirement for welfare eligibility,
- the removal of refugees from the three-month residency requirement,
- prevention, compliance and enforcement matters, and
- BC Benefits caseload statistics.

The Communications Branch also arranged special events, drafted speaking notes and letters, arranged media conferences and interviews, produced pamphlets and brochures and conducted advertising for ministry programs.

Corporate Services

The Corporate Services Branch supports the deputy minister by managing key ministry issues. It prepares and reviews briefing materials for the minister, deputy minister and executive council.

The branch receives and responds to a wide range of public inquiries, correspondence and concerns related to ministry legislation, policy and service delivery practices. It is also responsible for managing freedom of information requests and working with the Ombudsman's Office to address issues.

Correspondence Unit

The Correspondence Unit is responsible for the tracking and management of incoming letters to the minister's office and, working closely with program personnel, ensures responses are timely and confidential. An average of 150 letters were received each month during 1996-97, enabling the unit to help identify emerging issues.

Client Call Unit

The Client Call Unit responds to public inquiries and client specific inquiries about ministry programs, and provides general information and referrals to appropriate resources. The majority of calls deal with issues of extreme sensitivity: responses must be timely, fair and confidential. During 1996-97, the unit responded to an average of 210 calls each month. By March 1997, it had logged 3,585 calls since its inception in April 1995.

Information and Privacy Office

The Information and Privacy Office is responsible for the overall administration of the ministry's responsibilities under the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* (FOIPPA). The office ensures that the ministry is in full compliance with the legislated standards for the protection of privacy of personal information in its custody and control, and with the provisions for access to records held by the ministry, including an individual's personal information.

Key functions of the office include the management of formal requests for access to information made under the act and providing FOIPP direction, advice, training and education to ministry staff and stakeholders.

The office processed more than 550 requests for information during 1996-97, most of which were for personal information. Information is carefully reviewed in relation to legislation before

it is released. Due to a significant increase in volume, the ministry was unable to meet the legislated timeframes during the reporting period. In order to remedy the situation, additional staff were retained and a variety of efficiency measures were put in place which resulted in a reduction in the size of the backlog.

The office helped develop a number of information-sharing agreements and provided advice in their interpretation. It helped develop and revise the ministry's internal policy manual, participated in the investigation and resolution of privacy complaints, and represented the ministry in reviews involving the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner.

Finance and Management Services

Financial Services

The Financial Services Branch performs the ministry's financial and accounting functions. These include administrative and program payments, payroll, reconciliation of transactions and revenue collection. The branch operates from headquarters offices in Vancouver and Victoria.

During the latter half of 1996-97 (when the new ministry was created), the branch processed on average each month about:

- 345,000 income assistance payments (including direct payments to suppliers such as landlords and BC Hydro on behalf of clients),
- 19,000 billings from child care providers,
- 1,000 payments to contractors, and
- paycheques for 2,672 regular and auxiliary full-time equivalent staff.

Objective: *To monitor and improve the efficiency of payments on an ongoing basis and to provide a solution for clients who have difficulty getting to banks while minimizing the possibility of lost or stolen cheques.*

Strategy: In the fall of 1996, child care providers and those receiving disability benefits were given the option of receiving payments by electronic deposit. The option was later extended to regular income assistance recipients.

Results: For those who chose the electronic deposit option, speedier and more convenient transfer of funds has resulted. The option also eliminates the possibility of lost or stolen support cheques. And for the ministry, electronic deposit has reduced workload and allowed more efficient use of staff time.

Objective: *To review and amend the financial structure as a result of the split of the Ministry of Social Services, and the creation of the Ministry of Human Resources and the Ministry for Children and Families.*

Strategy: The branch negotiated a Memorandum of Understanding between the two new ministries to create a working relationship on the use of shared resources in 24 smaller offices across the province where separate offices would have created extra costs.

Results: The memorandum, which included such items as shared use of locally-issued imprest cheques, printers, offices and staff, has facilitated the partnership in small ministry offices.

Objective: *To enhance and maintain the system for recovering funds under repayment agreements and other accounts receivable.*

Strategy: A ministry-wide initiative was undertaken to create a new system that:

- controls and manages BC Benefits repayment agreements,
- better records and recovers repayment agreements, and
- sets up collection procedures to recover outstanding repayment agreements.

In October 1996, the branch piloted the use of collections agencies to recover receivables.

Results: The ministry developed a system that manages its receivables from repayment agreements totalling $89.5 million from 86,000 cases.

A policy to recover security deposits issued to clients for accommodation, implemented in a previous year, resulted in recoveries from landlords of $4.9 million in 1996-97. The ministry also issued $19.1 million in new security deposits.

In 1996-97, the branch recovered $11.3 million in income assistance payments made to clients for periods when unemployment insurance was payable from the federal government.

Budgets and Financial Planning

The Budgets and Financial Planning Branch is primarily responsible for coordinating the compilation of the ministry's budget, developing financial planning strategies to meet ministry financial goals, and establishing and managing effective financial and Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) reporting systems.

During 1996-97, the Budgets and Financial Planning Branch played a key role in transferring the authorized FTE allocation and budget for the Ministry of Social Services to the Ministry for Children and Families and the Ministry of Human Resources. This reorganization required major changes to the chart of accounts, FTE reporting system, and budget and expenditure monitoring systems.

1996-97 Full-Time Equivalent Allocation

Minister's Office –		**6.0**
Headquarters –		**574.4**
Corporate Services	21.9	
Communications	9.0	
Planning and Performance Measures	27.4	
Regional Operations:		
Assistant Deputy Minister	1.0	
Regional Management Services	4.0	
Prevention, Compliance & Enforcement	149.3	
Finance & Management Services:		
Assistant Deputy Minister	2.0	
Personnel Services Branch	48.2	
Financial Services Branch	123.3	
Information Technology Branch	109.1	
Budgets and Financial Planning Branch	9.9	
Administrative Services Branch	15.0	
Income Support Programs:		
Assistant Deputy Minister	3.0	
Income Assistance Division	34.4	
Health Services Division	32.4	
BC Benefits Appeal Board	3.5	
Chargeback - Daycare Subsidy Program	(19.0)	
Regions –		**1,817.6**
Vancouver	376.0	
Richmond/Burnaby/North Shore/Howe Sound	187.8	
Fraser North	229.2	
Fraser South	209.2	
Okanagan/Kootenays	186.3	
South Central Interior	178.7	
Prince George and the North	178.2	
North Island	205.1	
South Island	150.8	
After Hours	9.9	
Training Relief	28.5	
Chargeback - Child care Subsidy Program	(122.0)	
Total –		**2,398.0**

Administrative Services

The branch coordinates ministry mail service, manages the ministry's assets (equipment, vehicles and furniture), coordinates storage, retrieval and final disposition of ministry records, coordinates provision of office space for the ministry, and ensures that both internal and external provincial government customers have access to the most current telephone numbers and office locations for all Ministry of Human Resources employees.

Objective: *To form a new administrative services branch within the Ministry of Human Resources after the split of the Ministry of Social Services.*

Strategy: In forming a new branch, staffing was reviewed and personnel sought to fill the requirements.

Results: A director and a facilities and assets advisor were seconded from the Ministry of Finance and Corporate Relations, as well as personnel from the Ministry of Social Services Administrative Services Division director's office (Property Services and Records Management) which included a facilities manager, records manager, administrative support staff and a telephone data administrator.

Facilities, Assets and Equipment

This section provides accommodation, purchasing, photocopier, furniture and vehicle fleet services to the ministry.

Objective: *To facilitate closure of 14 income assistance offices by March 31, 1997.*

Strategy: Branch staff initiated a project team of service providers (buildings, equipment, systems) and clients (managers in the affected offices) to plan for the disposition of office space, equipment, utilities and services within the designated time frame.

Results: Office closures were completed by March 31 with the exception of one in Richmond (due to limited available office space within that specific geographical area).

Objective: *To promote fairness and equity in the distribution of Ministry of Social Services equipment and assets.*

Strategy: A joint Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the Ministry for Children and Families and Ministry of Human Resources to split the assets equitably.

Results: The process of distributing the assets began after the September 1996 announcement and continued beyond the 1996-97 year end.

Objective: *To maintain efficient, cost-effective services to the new ministry despite major organizational change and a Treasury Board freeze.*

Strategy: Staff reviewed and amended the branch organizational structure as a result of the split of ministries. Cross-training between staff positions within the Facilities, Assets and Equipment section was initiated to improve efficiency and flexibility. All accommodation requests were analyzed to ensure they were in keeping with government objectives.

Results: Services were provided in an efficient and effective manner. Ninety-six relocations or major renovations carried over from the previous year were completed, 76 new relocations or major renovations were identified, and 55 minor tenant improvements were made. By year end, 188 projects had been completed, 20 were cancelled and 19 were not completed and carried over to the next fiscal year.

Information, Records and Forms Management

This section develops and publishes policies, procedures and standards and provides advisory services, direction and training to ministry staff on recorded information management.

Objective: *To distribute the records of the Ministry of Social Services appropriately to the two new ministries.*

Strategy: During 1996-97, the branch began the process of splitting the records of the Ministry of Social Services, including file types, forms and the operational records classification system (ORCS).

Results: Approximately 900 forms files used by both ministries were reviewed and ownership or sharing of forms was determined.

Objective: *To assist with records and forms handling in the closure of 14 income assistance offices.*

Strategy: Procedures were distributed to offices designated for closure. On-site visits were required in some regions to assist staff in the process.

Results: Off-site storage of records from the affected offices was completed within the reporting period.

Objective: *To ensure effective and efficient off-site storage.*

Strategy: The ministry purchased services for off-site storage coordination through the Ministry for Children and Families.

Results: A total of 368 client files were located and retrieved from off-site storage, an increase of 51 from the previous year.

Telephone Data

Objective: *To create and maintain telephone data which updates the ministry's internal and Internet telephone directories and the printed government-wide telephone directory.*

Strategy: Phone and fax information were updated to create a new Ministry of Human Resources directory. New procedures were introduced to streamline the process and promote accuracy.

Results: The ministry internal directory (HRTEL), the Web site directory and the printed government directory are all providing current data to the public and to ministry staff.

Personnel Services

The Personnel Services Branch recruits and retains qualified staff for the ministry, facilitates positive and progressive employee relations, ensures staff are well-trained, ensures the appropriate application of legislation, collective agreements, progressive personnel practices and organizational design to maximize staff resources, provides for occupational health and safety and maintains library services for ministry staff.

The branch operates from a headquarters office in Victoria, from nine offices in each of the ministry's regions, a Training Centre in Richmond and a ministry library in Victoria.

Personnel services are provided for the ministry's 2,398 FTEs, 580.4 of them at headquarters offices and 1,817.6 in field offices throughout the province.

Objective: ***To review and amend organizational structure as a result of the division of the Ministry of Social Services into two ministries – the Ministry for Children and Families and the Ministry of Human Resources – and in accordance with a government-wide cost-reduction initiative.***

Strategy: Thirteen Income Assistance field offices were closed. Staff were deployed to other offices within their geographic area, often filling existing vacancies so staff reduction targets could still be met.

Results: No staff were laid off as a result of office closures and staff reductions. The cooperation and teamwork of ministry staff made for smooth implementation of the closures.

Objective: ***To establish an agreement related to administrative auxiliary employees with recall rights.***

Strategy: Extensive meetings were held throughout 1996-97 between the ministry, the Ministry for Children and Families and the B.C. Government Employees Union,

Results: An agreement was established under which laid off employees from either ministry would be hired back first to fill vacancies in either ministry.

Objective: ***To increase the use of knowledge, skills and ability (KSA) criteria in the hiring of ministry staff in every region.***

Strategy: The KSA process is intended to rely less on educational credentials which are not bona fide requirements for an occupation. Some of these historically have presented systemic barriers, contrary to the government's employment equity

policy. About 125 financial assistance workers were hired in 1996-97 using the KSA process.

Results: The ministry is able to consider a wider range of people who are suited to the work, increasing the quality of ministry employees.

Objective: To ensure a high level of skills among ministry staff.

Strategy: Existing core training programs (financial assistance work, administrative support, senior administrative support, district supervisor, family maintenance worker, prevention/compliance/enforcement, district supervisor, occupational health and safety) continued throughout the year. A week of training for acting district supervisors and training on prevention of violence in the workplace were added to the basic two-day occupational safety and health training.

Results: Training programs increased the level of competence, confidence and efficiency of ministry staff, contributing to increased levels of service quality.

Objective: To ensure ministry staff are sensitive to the diverse character of ministry clientele and staff.

Strategy: During 1996-97, multicultural/diversity training included:

- video-conferenced multi-site workshops on issues for immigrants and refugees;
- workshops (at district office request) on culturally specific topics, for example, inter-generational issues in South Asian families;
- workshops in partnership with non-profit community organizations (Parent in Crisis, SUCCESS, Immigrant Services Society).

Results: Training has resulted in a staff that is more culturally responsive, creating a work environment that is more welcoming of diversity with an increased presence of designated groups.

Until September 1996, the library of the Ministry of Social Services was located in Richmond (to serve the regions with material on income support, child welfare, family violence and disabilities) and in Victoria (to serve headquarters staff with material on policy, legislation, law and management). With the split of Social Services in September 1996, the two resulting ministries agreed that library services would continue to serve the staff of both.

(In May 1997, the Ministry of Human Resources agreed to take over the headquarters library and received the income support portion of the main collection. It is staffed by a librarian and an assistant.)

Information Technology

The branch plans, develops and maintains data processing and telecommunications systems for the ministry. It also trains staff on use of the systems and maintains system security controls.

In September 1996, the split of the Ministry of Social Services into two ministries necessitated the division of the existing hardware and software between the new ministries.

Objective: *To improve financial and management control over purchase authorizations issued to ministry clients from district offices for the purchase of goods and services, and to streamline office workloads.*

Strategy: In December 1996, a project was initiated to computerize the purchase authorization form and to require involvement of two individuals in issuing them. Electronic client files are automatically updated, new procedures were implemented for reconciling authorizations to invoices for goods and services, and automated reports assist staff in monitoring the program.

Results: Procedures around purchase authorizations were brought into compliance with the *Financial Administration Act* and Treasury Board and ministry policy.

Objective: *To determine the changes required to ministry systems to accommodate the century change from 1999 to 2000.*

Strategy: Computer programs have until now processed and recorded the date using only the last two digits to signify the year. In March 1997, a study was conducted to assess the extent of the changes required to ministry software, to identify the specific components to be modified and to plan conversion strategies and methods.

Results: The study estimated that there were 3.5 million lines of program code requiring modification. It also estimated that conversion would require about 415 person months at a cost of $4.4 million. To complete a conversion project would require a team of 21 full-time staff working for 15 months, the study estimated. Plans for carrying out the work were made in the following fiscal year.